

## The LINKING LOOP: Role of Rep, Paul Evans in More Civics

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*On this President's Day, Trammart News is delivering a new e-news edition of the "Linking Loop," which largely ceased publication during the pandemic. In 2022, The Linking Loop will periodically examine issues related to Oregon education and how they are likely to affect School District 13 J, as covid abates. Below is a profile with a question-and-answer session with Rep. **PAUL EVANS**, whose legislative efforts helped put more civics in education -- Anne Scheck, editor-publisher*

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Freshmen who enter Central High School (CHS) this year are on track to get a new civics education program by the time they're ready to put on that graduation cap and gown, thanks in part to a former CHS graduate, Rep. Paul Evans, who represents them in House District 20.

He was a force in the state legislature behind a bill ensuring that public high school students receive more classroom time learning about their government. Under the new requirement Oregon students will spend at least one semester, or the equivalent of that time, studying civics.

Evans, a US Air Force veteran, pushed for it because he feels patriotism isn't just about service to country, but also the duties of citizenship, he said. Understanding the inner workings of democracy at its very foundation -- from the US Constitution to the Bill of Rights -- begins with the importance of learning about candidates for office and voting in elections.

"I want students to have the necessary background, context and knowledge for this understanding," he said. The new measure is designed to give them a solid grounding of the three branches of government and of the historic milestones that built US democracy.

As Evans pointed out, these students are the people who "are our future leaders, and public schools are where most of them are right now." One day soon they will be taking seats as city councilors, state and federal legislators, and participating in places where they live in roles that may not be elected offices but will help build and maintain strong communities, he added.

Last year, Evans warned that, without the infusion of national dollars for infrastructure, Oregon was "one storm away from collapsing." The state's tax structure was the source of his worry -- Oregon depends on property tax revenue as the state's largest funding stream, and the level of increase is largely fixed, set by laws passed years ago.

However, Oregon's infrastructure demand also highlighted another need, he observed, and it's perhaps even more pressing: a way to offer a more thorough understanding of basic US government. Government provides the services upon which the American population often depends -- and which goes far beyond streets and bridges, he stressed.

In his grandparents' day, during a period when the economy was wracked by depression and a world war that meant continual sacrifice, belief in government seemed so much stronger, he noted. "They never saw government as the enemy," he said.

While he was growing up in the mid-Willamette Valley, in Monmouth, Evans had direct contact with

government, both in his classes at CHS, where guest speakers included local politicians, and by daily life in a small town, where elected officials were accessible, even to a high school student.

At 18 years old, Evans became the youngest city councilor ever to serve on the Monmouth City Council, as well as one of the youngest ever to hold elected office in the nation.

Around the same time, he began pursuing a degree in public policy administration at Western Oregon University, which he completed in 1992. He went into military service shortly afterward, spending most of his active duty with the 728th Air Squadron.

The combination of early public service -- he also was a volunteer for Polk County Fire District No. 1 in his youth, as well as his time in the US Air Force -- fueled a passion and commitment to democracy. He believes it's now in perpetual need of protection. "There is a difference between saying it's surviving and seeing it as thriving," he pointed out. Currently, some ideas surrounding the democratic system remind Evans of the message from a fast-food commercial. "Everyone seems to want to have it their way, at their time," he said.

The concept of "majority rule" appears to be hard to accept for some groups; the need to arrive at a compromise can be tough to understand for others, he said. Nowhere is this divide more apparent than in the way tax revenue is spent. Different political perspectives have led to troubling fragments, he observed.

"You have a right to know how your tax dollars are used," Evans stated. However, even at the most local levels that means placing faith in those who have been elected to public office. "Tax dollars benefit you, but they also may benefit people not like you," he explained.

Civics education might not wipe away all the misunderstanding, but knowledge about how laws are made, and how government operates, could help clarify what can seem an out-of-reach process to many people, he said.

Now even freedom of speech seems threatened by misinterpretation, according to Evans. In fact, one of his most frequently used expressions is the warning that "democracy dies in the shadows," he said.

*Trammart News Service* asked Rep. Evans to further explain the reasons behind his pursuit for passage of "the new civics requirement," as some are calling it. His answers follow.

1) *You have said that "right now our politics seem dominated by political instruments that delay progress." Can you explain what you mean? Will a civics course help students understand how such obstructions can occur?*

**EVANS:** Highly ideological political action committees/organizations are increasingly focused upon loyalty as 100% conformity to a framework-driven outcome. Compromise is becoming a negative, despite the requirement for compromise as a method for governance in a heterogenous/increasingly diverse population. Too many political organizations reward pyrrhic victories more than legitimate, objective progress. We need strong principle-driven organizations supporting candidates working for principle-driven outcomes -- but within a realistic realm of

decision-making.

*2) It's been said that the generation where more civics education is initially aimed -- called "Z" by some -- is more realistic than its predecessors but also more disillusioned. You observed that productivity and profitability seem no longer linked. Is it the job of government to make sure they are? Or that hard work leads to that promise of the past, "a chicken in every pot" that your grandparents were promised?*

**EVANS:** Government exists to secure a greater degree of equality, fairness, and justice -- not perfection -- because government is executed by people (for people). However, we are duty-bound to ensure profitability (often made possible through a foundation of publicly funded factors of production), is tied to the wages of those involved in the production of the service or thing being produced. A vibrant middle class is necessary for paying for the basic elements/factors of production: educated workforce, health care that is affordable for a healthy workforce, functioning infrastructure for movement of goods/services, etc. Hard work should be at the heart of our reward system, but a greater link through wealth sharing must be reimagined for the 21st Century or we will not be able to compete in the modern economy.

*3) You have said there ought to be more civics-oriented programs so that youth can get involved in public service, even going so far as to suggest that a short stint in a national service program might be a good idea. Are you talking about the kind you were able to participate in as a college student, as a volunteer in the fire department, or are you referring to special programs, like state conservation corps opportunities?*

**EVANS:** Yes, although I hope for more than home-based volunteer opportunities. In a perfect world, all Oregonians would serve a year or two years (paid) in public safety or service environments, and then move onto higher education and/or a career. However, I will take greater home-based experiences as an initial step forward.

*4) Do you have any recommendations, aside from the study of government, that you would like to see in the civics course. Should information on the armed services be included, in your view, for instance?*

**EVANS:** I believe there should be a robust community conversation about what else should be included.

*5) You also mentioned there ought to be incentives to get involved in their government, even for youth. Can you describe what you mean by that?*

**EVANS:** We give significant subsidies to business for all kinds of purposes (some helpful, some not). I think scholarships/paying for post-secondary education/workforce training, income tax credits, property tax credits, and/or other kinds of subsidy or benefits should be considered.

*6) You have mentioned that when you were young "wealth wasn't so aggregated," and cited as an example the bowling league that many parents joined, no matter what their background. Is there an equivalent way today in which people are -- or can be -- brought together, who might otherwise be in different groups?*

**EVANS:** Faith practice, community sports centers, and other activities could serve that role -- but often do not -- because working families must work harder, longer to keep pace with the costs of living in modern America. We need to revisit the mechanics of wealth distribution because it is

misaligned with modern times.

*7) You have indicated part of the need for civics in education stems from the disappearance of a day where Walter Cronkite delivered fact-based news and people were encouraged to "think for themselves" after they heard or viewed it. Not only is there no one of Walter Cronkite's stature today, most of Gen Z probably has never heard of him, which suggests maybe you think media needs to change, too. Is that right?*

**EVANS:** Yes, For-Profit media has devolved to a profit-motive only. We need another vehicle for maintaining a free-thinking, facts-matter-more-than-opinions (or ratings) foundation.